

## CLAIMS

Therefore, having thus described the invention, at least the following is claimed:

- 1           1.       A system for managing accounts within a network community,  
2       comprising:  
3           an account server to manage a plurality of direct accounts for a plurality of  
4       resident users of the network community and at least one guest account for at least one  
5       guest of a respective resident user;  
6           a client of a respective resident user of the network community configured to  
7       send to a non-resident user of the network community an invitation to become the  
8       guest of the respective resident user, wherein the account server is configured to create  
9       a guest account for the non-resident user after the sending of the invitation.
- 1           2.       The system of claim 1, the account server configured to:  
2       receive an answer to the invitation from the non-resident user;  
3       activate the guest account of the non-resident user if the answer to the  
4       invitation is an acceptance of the invitation; and  
5       delete the guest account of the non-resident user if the answer to the invitation  
6       is a declination of the invitation, wherein the invitation contains identification  
7       information about the non-resident user that is used to setup the guest account of the  
8       non-resident user and the invitation provides a mechanism for answering the  
9       invitation.
- 1           3.       The system of claim 1, wherein the invitation is an email message.
- 1           4.       The system of claim 1, wherein the invitation is an instant message.

1           5.       The system of claim 1, wherein a respective guest account contains a  
2       data field to specify an end-date for canceling the respective guest account, the  
3       account server configured to:

4       after occurrence of the end-date, offer a respective guest associated with the  
5       respective guest account an opportunity to convert the respective guest account into a  
6       new direct account;

7       schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a  
8       request to cancel a respective direct account of the respective resident user sponsoring  
9       the at least one guest account;

10       schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a  
11       request, from the respective resident user sponsoring the at least one guest account, to  
12       cancel the at least one guest account of the at least one guest; and

13       schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a  
14       request, from the at least one guest associated with the at least one guest account, to  
15       cancel the at least one guest account.

1           6.       The system of claim 5, wherein the request to cancel the at least one  
2       guest account is generated by an act of removing the at least one guest associated with  
3       the at least guest account from a roster list of the respective resident user.

1           7.       The system of claim 5, wherein the request to cancel the at least one  
2       guest account is generated by an act of removing the respective resident user from a  
3       roster list of the at least one guest.

1           8.       The system of claim 1, wherein members of the network community  
2       utilize a common network service, the members of the network community  
3       comprising the plurality of resident users and guests of the plurality of resident users.

1           9.       The system of claim 8, wherein the network service is an Internet  
2       application.

1           10.     A system for managing accounts within a network community,  
2     comprising:  
3           means for sending an invitation to a non-resident user to become a guest of a  
4     resident user;  
5           means for managing a direct account of the resident user of the network  
6     community and a guest account of the guest user of the network community, the guest  
7     account sponsored by the resident user;  
8           means for creating the guest account after sending the invitation to the non-  
9     resident user; and  
10          means for setting up the guest account with identification information  
11       contained in the invitation about the non-resident user.

1           11.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2           means for answering the invitation;  
3           means for activating the guest account if the answer to the invitation is an  
4     acceptance of the invitation; and  
5           means for deleting the guest account if the answer to the invitation is a  
6     declination of the invitation.

1           12.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2           means for specifying an end-date for canceling the guest account;  
3           means for, after occurrence of the end-date, offering the guest user an  
4     opportunity to convert the guest account into a new direct account;  
5           means for, after receiving an acceptance to the invitation by the non-resident  
6     user, determining if the resident user has an available guest slot; and  
7           means for activating the guest account if there is an available guest slot.

1           13.     The system of claim 10, further comprising:  
2                 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a  
3     request to cancel the direct account of the resident user who is sponsoring the guest  
4     account;  
5                 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a  
6     request, from the resident user sponsoring the guest account, to cancel the guest  
7     account of the guest user; and  
8                 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a  
9     request, from the guest user, to cancel the guest account of the guest user.

1           14.     A method for managing accounts within a network community,  
2     comprising the steps of:  
3                 managing a direct account of the resident user and a guest account of a guest  
4     of the resident user;  
5                 sending an invitation to a non-resident user of the network community to  
6     become a guest of a resident user of the network community, wherein identification  
7     information about the non-resident user is provided to generate the invitation; and  
1                 creating a new guest account for the non-resident user after sending the  
2     invitation to the non-resident user, wherein the identification information is utilized to  
3     setup the new guest account.

1           15.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2                 specifying an end-date for canceling the guest account, wherein the end-date is  
3     stored in a data field contained in the guest account; and  
4                 after occurrence of the end-date, offering the guest an opportunity to convert  
5     the guest account into a new direct account;

1           16.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2                 after receiving an acceptance to the invitation by the non-resident user,  
3     determining if the resident user has an available guest slot; and  
4                 activating the new guest account if there is an available guest slot.

1           17.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of:  
2           receiving an answer to the invitation;  
3           deleting the new guest account if the answer to the invitation is a declination  
4           of the invitation; and  
5           activating the new guest account if the answer to the invitation is an  
6           acceptance of the invitation.

1           18.     The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:  
2           after detecting an act of removing the guest from a roster list of the resident  
3           user, scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account; and  
4           after detecting an act of removing the resident user from a roster list of the  
5           guest, scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account.

1           19.     The method of claim 14, wherein members of the network community  
2           utilize a common network service, the members of the network community  
3           comprising resident users and guests of the resident users.

1           20.     The method of claim 19, wherein the common network service is an  
2           instant messaging service.